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An 'Era of Righteousness

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Maybe an "era of righteousness" has been inaugurated. Unfortunately, the limelight has been mistakenly focused on subsidies given to private organizations to protect national security. Very little is known by the public, however, about the huge subsidies that are distributed to all parts of the United States to protect the security of political parties and officeholders.

The sums involved in the cases that have recently been in the headlines are trivial in comparison with the billions of dollars that are flowing from the federal government to the states and cities, with no "watchdog committee" to tell the public who is getting the money and who is really benefiting from it.

There are, of course, some cries of suspicion being voiced that federal money is being improperly used to control the whole system of education in America, which is supposed to be the responsibility of the states alone. Senator Spessard L. Holland, D-Fla., has urged that there be adopted a constitutional amendment designed to prevent federal control of public schools. It would declare that the right of each state to determine the subjects taught, the kind of educational facilities, and the qualifications of personnel could not be

abridged, directly or indirectly, by the federal government. This proposal is being sponsored also by Senators George Smathers, D-Fla. and Sam J. Ervin Jr., D-N.C., and Rep. Robert Sikes, D-Fla.

But even a declaration through a constitutional amendment that the federal government shall not interfere in the educational processes would hardly be adequate. For the Department of Health, Education and Welfare today insists that it doesn't use its power to intervene in the slightest in the handling of education by states, counties and cities. It maintains that it furnishes only "advice" and is concerned that federal funds shall not be given to those school boards which apparently are engaged in contravening the broad wishes of the federal government.

The real crux of the whole problem is the right of federal officials to withhold public funds appropriated by Congress and to do so for whatever reasons the departments themselves may devise. The new constitutional amendment might not effectively interfere with the exercise of discretion by federal officials in disbursing funds to school systems. For some time there have been members of Congress who urge that the business

and professional affiliations of members of both houses should be disclosed. Codes of ethics have been proposed, but no machinery for pursuing any violations is mandatory. This is undoubtedly due to the political nature of Congress itself and the unwillingness of the leadership of a party to punish its own members unless, to be sure, some flagrant cases are publicly exposed.

Plenty of federal money, moreover, is going into projects in different parts of the country which are politically beneficial to senators and representatives of those same states. But there has never been any parallel to the present-day use of federal funds to control the action of states, counties and cities. The federal government has assumed the right to withhold public money and use its own judgment or discretion without disclosing the real motives for denial of the money.

Pressure by the federal government to change a curriculum in public schools or to select teachers and even students now is being exerted here as if it were an accepted federal function. Thus far, there has been no constitutional challenge presented to put an end to what is plainly a usurpation of power.